

**PENNS VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES  
March 20, 2017**

**PRESENT:**

**Penns Valley Regional Planning Commission**

Centre Hall	
Gregg Township	Doug Bierly and Charles Stover
Haines Township	Daryl Schafer and Charlie Valentine
Miles Township	Ron Hough
Millheim Borough	Sharon Heckman
Penn Township	Bob Fox and Leroy Young
Potter Township	Ron Grove

**Other:**

Mifflin County Planning and Development Department	Bill Gomes
Mifflin County Internet Advisory Committee	Mike Tate
Centre County Planning and Community Development Office	Linda Marshall

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Grove called the March 20, 2017 meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

No public comment.

**APPROVAL of MEETING NOTES Daryl and Bob Fox**

Mr. Grove called for additions or corrections to the January 16, 2017 meeting notes of the Penns Valley Regional Planning Commission. Mr. Schafer moved to approve the January 16, 2017 meeting notes, as written. Mr. Fox seconded the motion. The motion carried.

**Treasurer Report**

Ms. Marshall read the Treasurer's Report in Ms. Kirsch's absence. There is a Treasury balance of \$247.73 with one invoice paid in the amount of \$42.73 for the 2017 Meeting Schedule Legal Ad. Mr. Fox moved to approve the Treasurer's Report, and Ms. Heckman seconded the motion. The motion carried.

**Secretary Report**

No report.

## **PRESENTATION**

Ms. Marshall introduced Mr. Bill Gomes, Director of the Mifflin County Planning and Development Department and Mr. Mike Tate, Owner of GME Communication and a member of the Mifflin County Internet Advisory Committee.

For background information, Mr. Gomes provided some statistics on Mifflin County stating that the county has 18,000-19,000 households and a population of approximately 46,000 persons.

Mr. Gomes stated that the issue of internet became a big discussion in Mifflin County. He noted that the county does not have a four-year college; however, they do have a Penn State University Outreach Center and a medical lab tied in with the nursing school, which has been in place for fifteen years. He commented that Penns Valley residents have taken advantage of the educational opportunities in Mifflin County.

In December of 2015, Mr. Gomes stated the Penn State University announced that they were going to close down their operation in Mifflin County and instead tie Mifflin County in with the World-Wide Campus.

Mr. Gomes stated that he conducted an informal survey of the municipalities on internet service, and he learned that some are experiencing slow service and some do not have any issues with their service. He also noted that he reached out to the library and learned that 9,000 residents use the Wi-Fi service at the library.

Mr. Gomes added that his office started to look for maps showing the level of internet service in Mifflin County. He stated that the Federal Communications Commission has maps available; however, the data break-down is by Census blocks. Mr. Gomes commented that if there was one area in the block that had internet service then it showed the whole area as having coverage.

Mr. Gomes stated that this effort received buy-in from the Mifflin County Commissioners, and in July 2016, an Internet Summit was held with forty-two persons attending. Following the Summit, the Board of Commissioners formed the Mifflin County Internet Advisory Committee.

Mr. Gomes added that in order to learn what type of service is available in their County that they decided to work with Mr. Walt Whitmer of the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service to survey residents and businesses. The Committee is working with the Chamber of Commerce on a Survey Monkey survey and that the residential survey will be mailed to 2,000 households. The Board of Commissioners is going to pay for the surveys costs.

Mr. Gomes informed the Commission that they have spent some time looking for grant funds. He noted that they applied for the EPA Cool Connect Grant, but the County was not awarded the funding.

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In addition, the Mifflin County Internet Advisory Committee heard a presentation from USDA Rural Development staff, and they learned that assistance is mostly tied to loans.

Mr. Young asked Messrs. Young and Tate if Mifflin County followed a model from other communities. Mr. Gomes replied that he spoke with Planning Directors from counties across the state and most did not think that internet service was a problem. He stated that it is an issue in Juniata and some other rural counties.

Mr. Fox informed those present that he speaking as a Penn Township Supervisor and not as an employee of Verizon.

Mr. Gomes stated that Verizon is going to change their email service to AOL and that it is his understanding that businesses were informed that they have sixty days to sign up for an AOL account.

It was noted that Atlantic Broadband will provide service to an area in Mifflin County.

A question was raised as to who regulates data.

Mr. Fox stated that at some point they need to get their elected officials to fix this problem.

Mr. Gomes stated that a representative from Senator Corman's Office attends the Mifflin County Internet Advisory Committee meetings, and the representative has informed the Committee that the Senator's Office gets calls all the time about internet service and they are not sure what to do.

Mr. Gomes informed the Commission that they have been looking at having the water company lay conduit when the company is working on water lines. He added that at some point in the future, fiber could be run through the conduit pipe.

Mr. Fox commented that running conduit for internet service is safer; however, it is far more expensive.

Mr. Fox stated that Verizon is regulated, but the television cable company is not. Mr. Fox added that Comcast does not fall under the PUC (Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission).

Mr. Young asked Messrs. Gomes and Tate as to what is the Mifflin County Internet Advisory Committee's ultimate objective. Both replied that their objective is teamwork and that they do not have a long term plan at this time.

Mr. Tate informed the municipal representatives that they can purchase unlimited internet service through Costars for \$40 per month.

Mr. Fox commented that in order to stay up with technology you have to spend money. He continued by stated that fifteen years ago technology moved at a snail's pace; however, today it moves rapidly.

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It was noted that increased use of technology poses increased security risks.

Mr. Gomes stated that if internet carriers do not make this happen then local governments have to make it work.

Mr. Bierly commented on what the municipalities in the region have in common, which is each has smaller companies wanting to provide internet service, topography and geographic holes, and the same legislative district.

Mr. Gomes and Mr. Tate indicated that they would like to see a representative from CenturyLink on their Committee.

Ms. Heckman commented that there is no reliable cell service in Miles Township.

Mr. Tate responded to Ms. Heckman's by informing her that there was no cell service at the 4-H Camp in the Seven Mountains area until he installed a Wilson electronics device. The cost of the device is \$3,000.

Landline service was also discussed. Mr. Hough noted that 90 percent of the Amish rely on landline service. He added that if you get in an accident in the Livonia area that you cannot call the state police.

Mr. Fox informed Mr. Hough that he had followed up on Ms. Henninger's concerns, which were relayed by Mr. Hough at the January 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Regional Planning Commission. Mr. Hough responded by stating that it is his understanding that Ms. Henninger's service has improved.

It was noted that Millheim and the surrounding municipalities are served by the Millheim TV Transmission Company. Mr. Fox stated that the monthly rates run around \$50-60 per month.

Since the Millheim TV Transmission Company is a cooperative, Mr. Tate informed the Commission that the cooperative would be eligible for a USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) 2.9% loan. Mr. Tate believes that this would possibly be the best option for this area of the region to improve and expand internet service. He added that Nittany Media could help the company get upgraded if the transmission company transmits using an antennae and satellite. Mr. Tate recommended Mr. Greg Yahn as a contact for Nittany Media.

A question was posed as to whether or not internet service is that big of a deal for the residents and businesses in the Penns Valley Region. Mr. Schafer commented that it is. He explained that when he has guests call to reserve one of his cottages in the Village of Aaronsburg that when they find out that the cottages are not served by Wi-Fi they do not book a reservation.

Ms. Heckman added that there are times that she cannot download important documents/forms/reports for Millheim Borough. Ms. Heckman has had to ask state agencies if she can submit documents in paper form due to the unreliable internet service.

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Mr. Young remarked that it is his opinion that the Commission needs to have more information before approaching the legislators representing the region. Mr. Fox agreed by stating that the municipalities need to have their ducks in a row before bringing these issues to the attention of the representatives.

Mr. Bierly recommended that Penns Valley piggyback with Walt Whitmer's effort in Mifflin County, working with the Mifflin County Internet Advisory Committee on surveying businesses and residents on their internet service. Mr. Whitmer works for the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service and lives in Gregg Township.

A brief discussion occurred on the internet service available in the Village of Spring Mills, and Mr. Heckman commented that she does not think that a lot of people cannot afford the service provided by Flashpoint because of the monthly rates.

Mr. Valentine noted that smaller water companies are more susceptible to break-ins. He feels that there is a need for real-time observation cameras to protect the systems. He stated that there was a break-in at the Aaronsburg system, which resulted in the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection investigating the site and conducting water tests to make certain that the water quality had not been compromised. Mr. Valentine added that he had heard the total cost of the tests was approximately \$10,000.

Mr. Hough informed Mr. Valentine that the Miles Township Fire Company was awarded a grant to purchase and install security cameras and that the images from the cameras are then sent to smart phones.

Ms. Valentine stated that he looking for money for water system security for the Aaronsburg water supply since the system is currently served by a dial-up phone system, which cannot be tied in with a security system.

Mr. Fox informed the Commission that Mobilitie plans to erect a 120 monopole on Paradise Road, Penn Township. He added that Sprint will be the first company to hold a lease for the co-location of a wireless facility on the pole.

Mr. Fox explained that no permit is required for the monopole since it is not a structure. He added that Code Enforcement was under the impression that the pole was going to be erected in the PennDOT (Pennsylvania Department of Transportation) right-of-way; however, Paradise Road is not a state road. Mobilitie has already dug a hole for the pole.

Mr. Fox commented that Penn Township does not have a leg to stand on, and he continued by stating that the Township is concerned about safety since it was being erected too close to the road. Mr. Fox stated that he contacted the company, and they agreed to move the pole location within the right-of-way but further away from the cartway.

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A discussion occurred on creating a multi-county effort to address internet service needs in rural areas. Messrs. Gomes and Tate thought that the Natural Gas Cooperative would be a good model for such an effort.

**REPORTS:**

**Centre Hall Borough**

No representative was present

**Gregg Township**

No report

**Haines Township**

No report

**Miles Township**

No report

**Millheim Borough**

Ms. Heckman reported that the engineering study for the alleys in the business district has been completed, and she noted that Borough Council voted to accept the engineer's recommendations on the one-way streets.

**Penn Township**

No report

**Potter Township**

No report

**OLD BUSINESS**

**-Tri-Municipal Park and Recreation Committee Report**

No report was given. Ms. Marshall did inform the Commission that she attended the open house for the revised plan. The most current version of the plan had been distributed to the Commission via email.

**-Regional Comprehensive Plan Implementation**

Ms. Marshall informed the Regional Planning Commission members that she had received notifications from two municipalities (Millheim Borough and Haines Township) that their elected officials have approved the Goals for the update of the Regional Comprehensive Plan. She said that she would send out reminders to five the municipalities, requesting that the goals be considered in the near future.

**INFORMATION ITEMS**

Ms. Marshall distributed a flyer on the April 27, 2017 program on Public Accommodations and Fair Housing with presentation given by Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission staff. She informed the Commission that the target audience is municipal officials and staff. The flyer had been previously emailed to municipal secretaries and managers for distribution.

**FOR GOOD OF THE ORDER**

**ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business, Mr. Fox moved to adjourn the March 20, 2017 meeting of the Penns Valley Regional Planning Commission at 8:55 p.m. Mr. Hough seconded the motion. The motion carried.